

## Stages and Alternate Assessment Portfolios

IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Public Law 94-142 and its amendments) requires that all states have alternative assessment in place as of July 1, 2000. In response to this requirement to provide a means of assessing all students, many states have elected to include a portfolio-based assessment option. Stages assessment activities can provide valuable data for inclusion in a learner's Alternate (or Alternative) Assessment portfolio.

Professionals who work with a learner gather work samples and other products that show achievement of the learner's IEP goals. The resulting portfolio, which may be in electronic or paper format, is then reviewed to determine how well the learner has met these goals. Portfolios are a valuable way to document a learner's skill acquisition over time.

Each state with an alternative assessment system in place has its own guidelines for generating portfolios. In most cases, these guidelines define the types of evidence, or types of documents, that can be included in portfolios. Evidence is usually classified by the portfolio guidelines as Primary or Secondary in nature.

*Primary evidence* is data that proves a learner's achievement of a goal. An example of primary evidence might be a product of the student's work, a video of a student accomplishing the activity, or a software report that includes data that reflects the student's achievement.

*Secondary evidence* is data that demonstrates probable achievement, such as a still photograph of a learner at a task or a teacher's observation of the learner's performance.

Some states advise that formal assessments not be used to document a learner's achievement. They prefer that daily instructional software be used so that the learner is not placed in an unfamiliar setting at a crucial time to demonstrate his knowledge.

However, keep in mind that Stages is not a formal assessment, but rather a set of informal benchmark activities designed on an instructional model that provides feedback and coaching. The learner will have already encountered these activities during prior benchmark assessments. The Stages philosophy recommends the learner use practice software to build skills, periodically returning to the Stages benchmark activities to assess progress. The data generated using these activities can serve as primary evidence in the learner's portfolio.

During Stages software activities, the instructor can print directly from any screen to capture a learner-generated product. At the end of each activity, a report with instructional data about the time spent, choices made, response accuracy or work

product, input method, prompt type, and time/date stamp are displayed with the learner's name. The instructional team member can then print that screen or save the information as a text-format electronic file. In addition, observation forms recorded by the teacher during Stages activities may be included in the portfolio.

The software recommended in the Software Comparison Chart in this guide can also be used to collect evidence for portfolios. When the learner is using the computer, videos and screenshots can capture their achievements. Include in the portfolio information about access solutions and software settings.

Some states provide curriculum standards for special education students that differ from the mainstream standards. Because Stages activities cover core curriculum areas, they often correlate directly to a state's general and alternate standards. Assistive Technology, Inc. (ATI) has produced documents that tie Stages activities to curriculum standards in many states. Please contact ATI (800-793-9227) for information about correlations with your state's learning standards.

A portfolio-based alternative assessment can help you evaluate a learner's best environment for success and plan for future learning and recreational activities.